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Curry wove beauty into Hilton Head's fabric

Across the street from John and Valerie Curry's home in Sea Pines rests a sliver of paradise.

Val had always wanted her husband to buy the empty lot next door so it could be preserved as a quiet place of natural beauty. John had been an executive with Walt Disney before joining Sea Pines' leadership in 1973. He finally convinced Val that one does not pay a fortune for a lot and just sit on it. But John did do this. He worked with the powers that be in Sea Pines to dedicate the slip of open space across the street to Val's dream. Underbrush was cleared, and she got a landscape designer involved. You have to look hard to see that it's now a little park because it blends into the scenery. A bike path winds through it. Birds sing and flit around a bench resting among towering trees.

I thought of that little park when I heard that Val had succumbed to cancer Tuesday, leaving the island she loved two years after John passed away. The little park is a perfect picture of Val. It is beautiful,

and it reflects the values she and John urged Hilton Head Island to never forget.

"Quality and beauty were woven into our design," she told me in the spring. "Aesthetics matter."

Val will be remembered as the founding director and chairwoman of the committee that formed the Hilton Head International Piano Competition. She set the tone that it would be well-organized and have dignity, but most of all show warmth and hospitality to the contestants and judges.

Fewer would know Val as a history scholar. Because she got an opportunity during college to join the Walt Disney kingdom, she left college lacking 30 hours. She earned them here, at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, joking that it took her nine years. She was a star pupil in professor Larry Rowland's local history class, and I treasure her meticulous notes, which she gave to me. She also passed down to me several of the Lowcountry history books she collected to better appreciate the beauty of a place so different from her native California.

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Fewer still would know that after John died, Val found herself trimming and snipping plantings that had grown over grave markers in Six Oaks Cemetery. It wasn't long before Val seemed almost like a staff member, finding some sort of therapy in her work clothes as she left even the cemetery better than she found it. Val Curry found beauty here, and she enhanced it. She wove it into the fabric of our lives.



Curry